

## PHIL 356-2 | Ancient Greek Philosophy: The Concept of Life in Plato and Aristotle and its Relevance Today Fall 2026

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### Course Description

During this course we will explore the concept of life in ancient Greek philosophy and its relevance to contemporary philosophical debates. In the first part of the course we will examine the notion of life in the context of Plato's and Aristotle's metaphysical, psychological, political and ethical writings. Our primary aim will be to understand how Aristotle's explicit treatment of life challenges Plato's dualistic, metaphysical theory of Forms and leads to a distinct conception of ethics and politics. Through the comparison of the relevant doctrines and views we will seek to get a better understanding of the crucial role that the concept of life plays in the formation of the ancient Greek philosophy of ethics, politics and culture. In the second part of the course we will try to appreciate the extent to which this philosophy of life informs the inception and critique of modern thought, while also providing a potential alternative to the challenges it faces. By studying modern and contemporary thinkers, we will see how the treatment of the concept of life by ancient Greek philosophers has become a primary focus in contemporary debates concerning pressing ethical and political challenges posed by late modernity, notably those pertaining to totalitarianism, the Holocaust and the issue of animal rights.

### Course Approach

This course takes an interactive approach, using as minimal lecturing as possible to promote hands-on engagement with philosophical ideas. Through class discussions and group activities, students will explore ancient and modern texts, assess arguments, and debate key philosophical questions, while weekly reading and writing assignments will reinforce both analytical and academic writing skills. In-class assignments, including group assessment of philosophical perspectives and analysis of specific arguments, artistic representations of ideas and structured debates will allow students to collaboratively examine and understand complex concepts. A mid-term essay and a final project, tailored to students' interests, will provide an opportunity for deeper exploration, while the course's inclusive approach aspires to make it accessible to both students with a background in philosophy and newcomers eager to engage with the discipline.

### Learning Objectives

By the end of the course the students will be able to:

- Identify, understand and reflect on the ethical and political issues and challenges raised within the context of philosophy of life.
- Discuss and interpret key concepts and aspects of classical ancient Greek philosophy.
- Critically compare the different views held by ancient, modern and contemporary philosophers on the nature and logic of life and its ethical and political implications.
- Analyze, compare and contrast the logical structure of philosophical arguments.
- Apply and deepen the acquired understanding, knowledge and skills by compiling a well-balanced and theoretically informed academic essay and final project which clearly articulate and critically analyze issues of their interest.

### Course Requirements

Successfully completing this course involves active participation, presentations, reading, and both written and creative assignments:

- **Class Participation:** In this class, philosophy is being taught as an activity and not a mere body of doctrine. As a consequence, we will all try to engage in dialogue with each other, starting from what we know and experience and moving on to a philosophical understanding of each of the concepts and problems we will be reading about in class. Class Contribution includes physical and mental presence in the classroom, arriving on time, preparation, participation in class discussions. Reading assignments are to be completed before each class session. Students are expected to come prepared, engage in our discussions, ask questions, and voice their opinions in class. If someone feels extremely uncomfortable speaking in front of a large group of students, they should consult me in order to discuss alternative options for participation.

- **In-class presentations:** Students are expected to deliver a 10-15 minute presentation on an assigned philosophical text, working individually or in pairs. Depending on class enrollment, each student will complete one or two presentations per semester. Presentations must include a summary of the text, an analysis of its central arguments, key takeaways relevant to the course theme, and a critical evaluation of its philosophical merit.
- **Reading:** Students are expected to complete on average 30-60 pages of weekly reading. The reading assignments will consist of a selection from ancient Greek, modern and contemporary philosophy texts and optional reading of secondary literature. The texts will be either available at the CYA library or accessible in PDF form on Moodle.
- **Written work:** Students are expected to submit weekly informal (1-2 pages long) reflections based on the week's readings delivered to my email one day before the first class or second class of the week. The reports will not be graded separately. The grade will be calculated based on their timely submission and overall quality. Additionally, you are expected to submit on a specified date a 3-5 pages long mid-term paper the guidelines for which will be discussed in class.
- **Final project:** For their final project students will be asked to critically engage with the course material by choosing one of three formats: a philosophical dialogue or debate, a conceptual podcast episode or a thought experiment design. Projects may be completed individually or in groups. The philosophical dialogue or debate requires crafting a scripted exchange between thinkers, exploring key arguments and counterarguments, and may be either recorded or presented live during the final exam week. The conceptual podcast episode involves producing an audio presentation and/or discussion that examines a philosophical question through theories, examples and creative dialogue. The thought experiment design entails constructing an original hypothetical scenario that challenges assumptions about life and may be presented as either a video that explains and visualizes the experiment or an academic poster. Topics and detailed guidelines will be discussed in class.

## Evaluation and Grading

The evaluation of the students' overall academic performance will be based on:

- Class participation and attendance.
- Commitment to the reading assignments.
- The timely submission and overall quality of the weekly reports.
- In-class presentations of assigned readings.
- Development of research and writing skills.
- The quality of the mid-term essay and the final project.

Your grade for this course will be based on the following distribution:

Class participation:	10%
Class presentations:	10%
Weekly reports:	25%
Mid-term essay:	25%
Final project:	30%

## Evaluation Criteria - Course Assignments

- **Class participation, presentations and weekly reflections:** comprehensive and clear presentation of arguments, solid understanding of the readings, respectful and productive engagement in discussion.
- **Mid-term essay and final project:** originality of ideas, well defined thesis, straightforward structure, clearly elaborated and logically structured arguments, serious consideration of counterarguments.

## CYA Regulations and Accommodations

### Attendance Policy

Consistent attendance is essential for success in this course, as it is built around learning through discussions, in-class activities and debates. For any absence (excused or unexcused), you are responsible for contacting me promptly to arrange for make-up work. Please note that the authority to excuse an absence lies with the CYA administration, not the instructor, and requires proper documentation as specified in the student handbook.

**Per CYA policy, 2 unexcused absences** are allowed without penalty. **Beginning with your third unexcused absence, your course grade will be reduced.** Grade reduction escalates as follows:

- 3rd unexcused absence: Reduces the participation component of your grade (10% of the final grade) by 2 points.

- 4th unexcused absence: Reduces your class participation grade by an additional 2 points.
- 5th unexcused absence: Reduces your participation grade by an additional 3 points.
- 6th unexcused absence: Results in an F (0/10) for the participation component.

**A 7th unexcused absence constitutes a failure to meet course requirements and will result in an F grade,** except in extraordinary circumstances approved by the Academic Director. CYA regards attendance in class and on-site (in Athens or during field study trips) as essential. Absences are recorded and have consequences. Illness or other such compelling reasons which result in absences should be reported immediately to the Student Affairs Office.

**ePolicy on Original Work and Use of Artificial Intelligence**

Unless otherwise specified, all submitted work must be your own original work. Any ideas taken from the work of others must be clearly identified as quotations, paraphrases, summaries, figures etc., and accurate internal citations and/or captions (for visuals) as well as an accompanying bibliography must be provided.

The use of generative AI tools is a new, undeniable reality. In this course, the guiding principle for their productive use is that you must always remain the primary author and critical thinker behind all submitted work. AI may be used ethically as a tool for development, but never as a substitute for your own intellectual effort.

**Permitted Uses:** You may use AI for brainstorming, clarifying concepts and passages, editing your original prose, debating ideas, formatting (not generating from scratch) citations and bibliography sections, or reviewing a completed draft. You may also request a generic outline to organize initial thoughts, provided you substantially modify and expand it into your own work. *In all cases, you are required to review, verify and take full responsibility for the final output.*

**Prohibited Uses:** It is academic dishonesty to use AI to generate drafts, paragraphs, or answers to assignments, to complete in-class or reflective work, or to submit AI-generated content without your significant intellectual transformation and synthesis.

To ensure the integrity of submitted work, I reserve the right to ask students to orally explain or defend the content and reasoning behind any submission. Such a request comprises a standard check, not an accusation. If a student is unable to do so, I may require the work to be revised and resubmitted. A persistent inability to adequately explain the work may be treated as a violation of academic integrity.

It is imperative to understand that AI can produce incorrect or biased information. Your critical judgment is essential. You are responsible for fact-checking all content and ensuring your final work reflects your own understanding. Specific applications and citation practices will be further discussed in class. When in doubt, ask for clarification!

**Use of Laptops**

In-class or onsite use of laptops and other devices is permitted if this facilitates course-related activities such as note-taking, looking up references, etc. Laptop or other device privileges will be suspended if devices are not used for class-related work.

**Class Schedule**

Day #	Date/Day	Topic / Readings / Assignments Due / Place (if applicable)
1		Introduction
2		Everything is full of Gods: The ensouled cosmos of the early Ionian thinkers
3		The examined life in Plato’s Apology
	Sep 17-19	FS Crete
4		The private and public life in Plato’s Crito
5		The immortality of the soul in Plato’s Phaedo
6		Justice in the soul in Plato’s Republic (Bk I)
7		Justice in the city in Plato’s Republic (Bk II)
8		The division of the soul in Plato’s Republic (Bk IV)
9		The Good in Plato’s Republic (Bk VI, VII)
10		Nature in Aristotle’s Physics (Bk I, II)
	Oct 8-10	FS Peloponnese
11		Form in Aristotle’s Physics (Bk II) and actuality in Aristotle’s Metaphysics (Bk IX)
12		Soul as the actuality of the body in Aristotle’s On the Soul and the human and the animal in The Movement of Animals
13		Midterm Week Course overview and discussion of midterm paper topics

Day #	Date/Day	Topic / Readings / Assignments Due / Place (if applicable)
14		Midterm Week Watch Ingmar Bergman's film <i>The Seventh Seal</i> Midterm papers due by Oct 23 @midnight
	Oct 23-Nov 1	Fall Break
15		The good life as the excellent activity of the soul in Aristotle's <i>Nicomachean Ethics Book I</i>
16		The human excellences/virtues in Aristotle's <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> Book III and the life of the citizen in Aristotle's <i>Politics Book I, III</i>
17		The human and the animal in Descartes' <i>Meditations</i> and <i>The Passions of the Soul</i>
	Nov 11-14	FS Abroad
18		The affirmation of life, the overman and life as will to power in Nietzsche's <i>Thus Spoke Zarathustra</i> and <i>Will to Power</i>
19		Vita activa in H. Arendt's <i>The Human Condition</i>
20		Iris Murdoch, <i>The Sovereignty of the Good</i>
	Nov 26-29	Thanksgiving Break
21		Giorgio Agamben, <i>Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life</i>
22		Jonathan Coetzee's <i>The Lives of Animals</i> and Jacques Derrida's <i>The Animal that Therefore I am</i> (following) Email me your suggested final project topic by Sunday Dec 6 @ Midnight
23		Becoming-animal in G. Deleuze's and F. Guattari's <i>Thousand Plateaus</i> and D. Haraway's <i>When Species Meet</i>
24		Final discussion
FEW	Dec 14-17	Final Exam Week Final Projects due by Dec 17 @ Midnight

### Course Bibliography

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